

MILITARY BOUNTY LANDS.

[To accompany bill H. R. No. 1167.]

LETTER OF COMMISSIONER OF GENERAL LAND OFFICE.

FEBRUARY 25, 1839.

Laid before the House by Mr. Loomis, from the Committee on the Public Lands.

GENERAL LAND OFFICE, *February 12, 1839.*

SIR: In reference to the subject of your communication of the 9th instant, I have the honor to state, that, of the aggregate amount of lands appropriated by law for satisfying military bounties, (6,000,000 acres,) there have been patented, in the aggregate, to the period of closing the Arkansas lottery, (the lands being disposed of by lot,) the quantity of 4,396,320 acres, leaving 1,603,680 acres of the aggregate quantity of land so appropriated *unapplied* towards satisfying such bounties.

The reasons why the entire quantity of land surveyed for these bounties was not applied, as is detailed in my letter of the 29th December, 1837, to the honorable Archibald Yell, (document No. 83, 2d session 25th Congress,) are found in the necessity for *excluding* such of the land surveyed for the object as did not appear, from the notes of survey, to be *fit for cultivation*, or where individual tracts either fell short of or exceeded the quantity of land allotted as a bounty, single or double, (160 or 320 acres, as the case might be.) It, therefore, resulted that the *entire quantity* of land in the districts of country surveyed in *Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas*, for the object, was, in no case, *actually selected* for the respective lotteries of the military bounties in those States; and the unselected residue was, in each district, afterwards *put into market* as other public lands.

The balance of the lands appropriated in Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas, not applied to satisfy bounties for the reason assigned in my letter to Mr. Yell, is as follows:

In Illinois,	668,160 acres.	Lottery closed in 1819.
In Missouri,	26,880 do.	Lottery closed in 1819.
In Arkansas,	908,640 do.	Recently closed.

1,603,680 acres.

These lands were offered at public sale many years since, and a great part of them sold; and it is my opinion that, without further provisions of law, other land cannot be substituted therefor, as the regions of country

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to which the several military surveys were restricted in each case, are occupied by settlers having pre-emption claims.

Although authority was found under existing laws for setting apart a further quantity of land for the object, I would take leave to suggest whether it is not a very questionable policy to set apart a body of land for an exclusive purpose, where the power of bringing the concern to a close depends upon the action of individuals in asserting their claims from time to time. The effect of the continued reservation would be to prevent the possibility of settlement of the lands faster than they are located by the claimants. The soldiers having deceased, for the most part, and their heirs and legal representatives generally being obscure individuals, mostly ignorant of the proper mode of asserting their claim to warrants until instructed by the advice of their Representatives in Congress, or of others, to whom they may be induced to apply for information, may, from these causes, be a long time in preferring their several claims. Influenced by the consideration that the continued reservation of a tract of country for satisfying those warrants was a positive injury to the State or Territory in which it existed, I was induced to recommend, in my letter to the honorable Archibald Yell, above referred to, the plan for satisfying those bounties, as presented from time to time, by the issuing of a *scrip*, in quantities conforming to the legal subdivisions of the public lands; which scrip should bear the same checks as in the case of scrip issued for Virginia military and United States revolutionary bounties, viz: the seal of the Treasury, the signature of the Secretary of the Treasury, and the counter-signature of the Commissioner of the General Land Office. The scrip to be located as Congress may see fit to direct, either exclusively in one State or Territory, or generally in all the public land States and Territories.

The number of warrants issued and not located, and claims to warrants not yet presented, constitute an aggregate estimated at upwards of *seven thousand* warrants, as set forth in the communication referred to. It is not believed that more than *two hundred* cases of warrants will be presented for location in any one year; most probably not exceeding one hundred. This estimate will serve to convey some tolerable idea of the length of time, viz: from 35 to 70 years, that may elapse before any tract of country set apart for the purpose of satisfying the balance of those claims would probably be fully located.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, your obedient servant,

JAMES WHITCOMB,

Commissioner.

Hon. A. LOOMIS,

Committee on Public Lands, H. R.